



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
Boston Healthcare System

News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 8, 2022

Aerosols may contribute to hospital transmission of COVID-19

BOSTON – Hospital transmission of COVID-19 may result from aerosol-borne virus, according to research published today by VA Boston Healthcare System researchers in JAMA Network Open.

“Prior to this, aerosol-borne COVID-19 virus had not been linked specifically to outbreaks in hospitals,” said Dr. Eric Garshick, associate chief for the Pulmonary, Allergy, Sleep and Critical Care Medicine Section at the VA Boston Healthcare System; professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School; and corresponding author of the study. “Virus sequences found in aerosols collected at a nurses station and in human samples during the outbreak suggest that aerosols may have contributed to hospital transmission.”

The study included patients and nursing staff in a VA hospital inpatient unit and long-term care facility during a COVID-19 outbreak between Dec. 27, 2020, and Jan. 8, 2021. One additional finding was that hospital units where staff were tested regularly had less aerosol-borne virus than those where staff were not regularly tested.

“The findings also suggest that precautions including surveillance, ventilation, masking and social distancing may be effective in reducing the risk of hospital transmission,” concluded Dr. Rebecca Stern, a post-doctoral fellow with the Department of Environmental Health, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and lead author of the study.

The paper is available on JAMA Network Open at

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2793153>

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Dr. Rebecca Stern, a post-doctoral fellow with the Department of Environmental Health, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and lead author of a study published June 8, 2022, finding hospital transmission of COVID-19 may result from aerosol-borne virus, and corresponding author Dr. Eric Garshick, associate chief for the Pulmonary, Allergy, Sleep and Critical Care Medicine Section at the VA Boston Healthcare System, and professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. (Courtesy photos)